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Party politics are to blame

What the Hawaii Legislature does and why is seldom clear-cut. One exception is the refusal to let the state's voters decide whether they want local school boards.

Gov. Linda Lingle made educational reform, i.e., the dismantling of a top-heavy state bureaucracy, her No. 1 priority for the state. The plan has been defeated in the state House twice and is barely alive in the Senate, mostly because it is being proposed by a Republican who owes no special allegiance to government unions or the state bureaucracy.

There is strong evidence of popular support for an overhaul of the government's school bureaucracy, particularly on the Neighbor Islands, far from the offices where all major decisions are being made.

Despite that evidence - chief of which is the election of Lingle - the majority of state lawmakers can't bring themselves to give voters the option of voting on local school boards. In the House, the majority Democrats want to further centralize the public school system by giving the Board of Education more power. There's only one conclusion that can be reached from the actions of the state House leadership and its followers: They don't trust voters to know what is best for their children. This opinion is being backed up by professional educators who think common sense is superceded by academic training when it comes to running schools.

House Democrats say they are reforming



education in Hawaii by a number of measures, some of which are supported by Gov. Lingle and The Maui News. The fact is these measures could be implemented at the same time the Legislature allows voters to have a direct say on the future course of education in Hawaii.

The Democrats in the Legislature - especially in the House, and probably in the Senate - are delivering one clear message to the voters of Hawaii. That message is politics as usual. They do so at their own political peril.

The state's voters should be allowed to decide if Hawaii needs local school boards.

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